



CEREBUS

RICK'S STORE

10

229
APR

He was very difficult all the fall, but he had begun to work on a novel when he was sober. I saw him rarely when he was sober, but when he was sober he was always pleasant and he still made jokes and sometimes he would still make jokes about himself. But when he was drunk he would usually come to find me and, drunk, he took almost as much pleasure interfering with my work as Zelda did interfering with his. This continued for years but, for years too, I had no more loyal friend than Scott when he was sober.

That fall of 1925 he was upset because I would not show him the manuscript of the first draft of *The Sun Also Rises*.^{*} I explained to him that it would mean nothing until I had gone over it and rewritten it and that I did not want to discuss it or show it to anyone first. We were going down to Schruns in the Vorarlberg in Austria as soon as the first snowfall there.

I rewrote the first half of the manuscript there, finished it in January, I think. I took it to New York and showed it to Max Perkins of Scribner's and then went back to Schruns and finished rewriting the book. Scott did not see it until after the completed rewritten and cut manuscript had been sent to Scribner's at the end of April. I remembered joking with him about it and him being worried and anxious to help as always once a thing was done. But I did not want his help while I was rewriting.

While we were living in the Vorarlberg and I was finished rewriting the novel, Scott and his wife and child had left Paris for a watering place in the lower Pyrénées. Zelda had been ill with that familiar intestinal complaint that too much champagne produces and which was then diagnosed as colitis. Scott was not drinking, and starting to work, and he wanted us to come to Juan-les-Pins in June. They would find an inexpensive villa for us and this time he would not drink and it would be like the old good days and we would swim and be healthy and brown and have one apéritif before lunch and one before dinner. Zelda was well again and they were both fine and his novel was going wonderfully. He had money coming in from a dramatization of *The Great Gatsby* which was running well and it would sell to the movies and he had no worries. Zelda was really fine and everything was going to be disciplined.

I had been down in Madrid in May working by myself and I came by train from Bayonne to Juan-les-Pins third class and quite hungry because I had run out of money stupidly and had eaten last in Hendaye at the French-Spanish frontier. It was a nice villa and Scott had a very fine house not far away and I was very happy to see my wife who had the villa running beautifully, and our friends, and the single apéritif before lunch was very good and we had several more. That night there was a party to

^{*}Published in England as *Fiesta*

continued on last page

DAVE SIM
Creator, Writer,
Characters/
pencil & ink,
lettering

GERHARD
Background
Artist/pencil &
ink, cover
colourist,
mechanical tones

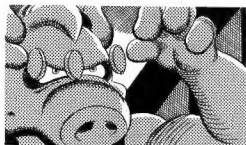
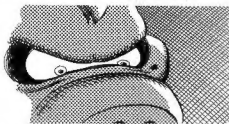
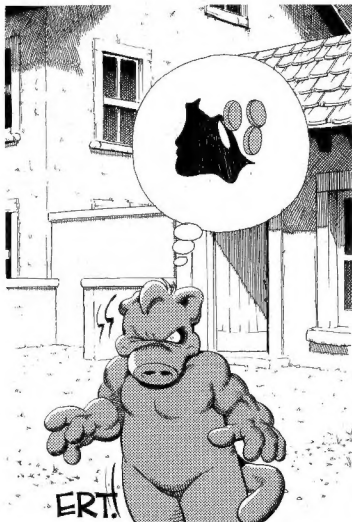
CAROL WEST
Administrative Assistant

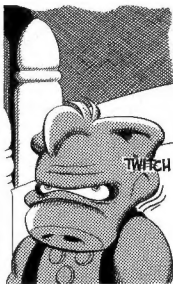
DIANA SCHUTZ
Proofreading

**RICK'S
STORY**

(Cerebus 220
to Cerebus 231)

MONTHLY
ALL CONTENTS
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PRINTED IN CANADA
by PRENEY PRINT
& LITHO, WINDSOR,
ONTARIO





SO CEREBUS' MEDALLIONS SHRUNK

SO WHAT?

DOESN'T MEAN A THING

THERE ARE A HUNDRED PERFECTLY REASONABLE EXPLANATIONS

NAME ONE.

ACTUALLY CEREBUS HASN'T GOT TIME TO 'NAME ONE' CEREBUS HAS TO LEAVE

TUMP

TUMP

BEFORE RICK'S CONTAINER SPELL GETS AHEAD OF CEREBUS...

UNLESS

UNLESS WHAT?

UNLESS IT ISN'T A CONTAINER SPELL

HAH...WHAT ELSE COULD IT BE?

IT COULD BE AN EXPELLER SPELL

AN...EXPELLER SPELL...

TUMP

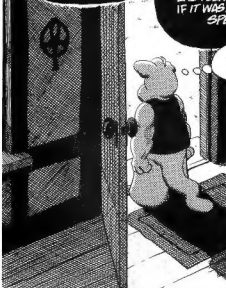
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THEN STAYING WOULD BE EASY AND LEAVING WOULD BE HARD.

OF COURSE! JUST LOOK HOW EASY LEAVING IS... IF IT WAS A CONTAINER SPELL

HE IS?

SURE. RICK IS TRYING TO GET CEREBUS TO LEAVE

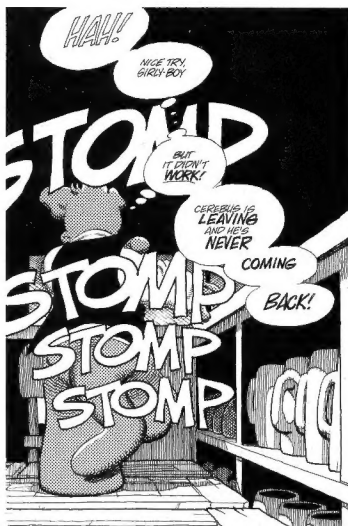
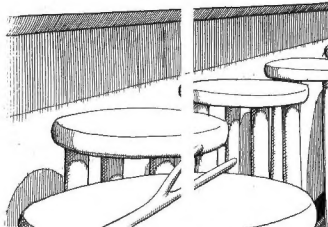
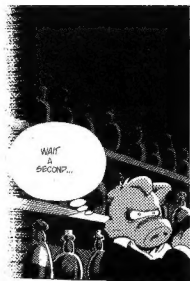


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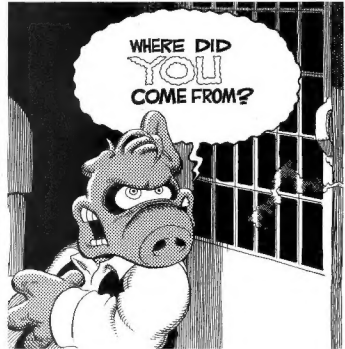
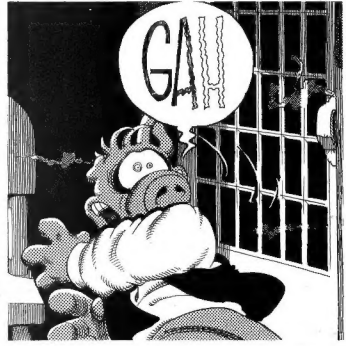
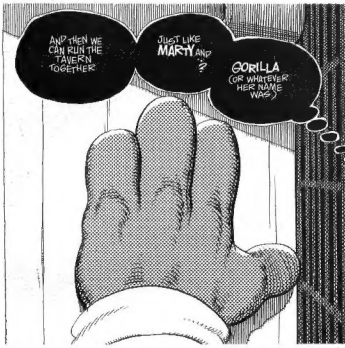


HMM.

AND CEREBUS ALMOST FELL FOR IT







(unhelpful) Hamilton.
(even less helpful) Ontario. Canada.
(distracting him with a provocation)
So. Are you the bartender around here?

(wrestling with it)
(but finally resigned to his fate) Aye.

I was hoping you'd turn up.
(adopting a more conciliatory tone before
he can take offense) I have to leave soon.

(coming a little unglued) LEAVE?!

HAH! That's a laugh!
(a pronouncement) No one leaves this
tavern! NO one! (a sweeping theatrical
gesture) This isn't a TAVERN!

It's a....a...PRISON! EVERYone who
comes in here is trapped! (horrified at his
own insight) TRAPPED!

Huh. (glancing around)
So...uh...where is everybody?

(overwrought) THEY ALL LEFT!

But...you just...

(amputating the contradiction) SO!
(the consummate professional)
What'll it be? (twich)

Oh...uh...a Coors Light.
And an ashtray. Please.

Comin' right up! (he selects a bottle of red
wine and a wine glass) (as he pours, his
façade of forced cheerfulness appears to
drain into the glass along with the wine)

(selecting the moment)
So you've been here a long time.

Aye. (confessional)
Years. (funereal) Forever.

(flicking ashes onto the floor)
I spent way too much time
(significantly) in a place very much like this.

(as if seeing me for the first time) Aye?

Uh-huh. (lightly) Peter's Place, it was
called. Spent the better part of ten years of
my life there. I just couldn't bring
myself to (pretending to strain at le mot
juste)...leave...(vaguely) somehow.

(hypnotized) Huh. (he mulls it over)
So...how...how...did you...?

(matter-of-factly) The place was gutted by
fire one night. (pausing to let it sink in)
(introspective) I might've been able to leave
on my own. Just decide that I had had
enough and never go back in again. Who
knows? (honestly) I really doubt it, though.

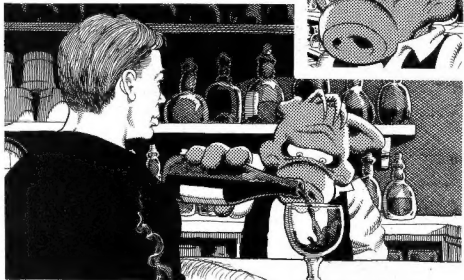
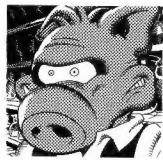
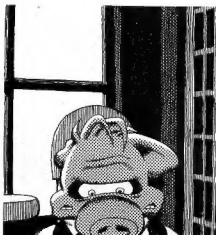
(Blissful, almost reverent) Gutted by fire.

(nailing it) That bad, eh?

(startled awake) (stoic) Nay. (after some
consideration) Aye. (pause) It's as if
(really examining it)...it's as if...(opening
the can of worms) Cerebus is being
punished for something he didn't do
(quickly) NAY! It's as if Cerebus is being
punished for EVERYthing.
For every bad thing Cerebus ever DID.

And...and...Cerebus can't
leave...until...until Cerebus has...
(losing the train of thought)...

(finishing the thought)
...served his sentence?





Aye.

(taking a drag on my cigarette) Interesting.
(peering at me with a new intensity)
 You look familiar.

(truthfully) I get that a lot.
(attempting an evasion) I just have one of those faces, I guess. *(He's unconvinced, and I'm forced to make him think he hasn't served my drink yet.)*

(perplexed, staring at the empty expanse of bar in front of me) Sorry. What was it you ordered again?

A Coors Light. And an ashtray. Please.

Right. *(still perplexed, he selects another wine glass and fills it from the bottle of red wine)* You must think Cerebus is insane. You tell Cerebus you have to leave soon, and Cerebus just stands here...*(it doesn't add up)*...talking.

(a stopgap measure) No problem.
(misdirecting his attention) I don't have to leave right this minute. Just *(emphasizing it to reassure him)* you know...soon. *(leap-frogging the conversational sequence — my peculiar social vice)* I was always waiting for a...sign...I guess.

(returning the lob) A sign.

That it was time to leave Peter's Place.
(clarifying) Permanently, I mean. *(trying to explain)* Waiting to...hear something or...see something that would tell me that I had...

(the star pupil)...served your sentence.

(surreptitiously grinding out my cigarette on the floor) Exactly.

(very much amused) And then the tavern burned to the ground.

(chuckling) "Okay! Okay!
 I can take a hint."

(we both laugh)

(after the laughter has subsided) But for the longest time it was as if I was immobilized. *(belabouring the analogy of our respective situations)* I didn't want to spend any more time there...but, at the same time, I couldn't think of anything else I wanted to do *(noting the "Sand Hills Creek" look in his eyes)*...at least anything else I wanted to do badly enough to leave. *(the "Sand Hills Creek" look vanishes and he winces at the fresh memory of resigning himself to die here)* You ever been married? *(as if I didn't know)*

Aye.

It was like that. It was like being married.

(understanding instantly) Aye! *(wrapping his own words around it)* That's what Cerebus is going through right now. It's as if Cerebus has spent his whole life in this place — as if Cerebus was born here. *(gloomily)* As if Cerebus is going to die here.

(leaving him to wallow in it for a few seconds) It's not all bad, though.

(genuinely surprised) It isn't?

(laughing out loud) No. It really isn't.
(the veteran) You have to be away from it a



long time to see it that way, though.
(my social vice again) To me,
it's one of the hardest things about life.

(taking the bait) What is?

(with a little extra emphasis, hoping it sticks)
Appreciating what you have when you have
it. Instead of waiting until you lose it to
appreciate it. (eyebrows up) What? EVER...
IT... is. (I let him chew on that one a while)
Someday you'll miss this place (too direct?)

YOU'RE CRAZY!! (yep, too direct)
Miss THIS place? MISS JUST...
JUST STANDING AROUND
ALL DAY...JUST...

(interrupting) Thinking.
(in full flight) GOING INSANE!
GOING STARK, RAVING MAD!!

(trying to restore him to my wavelength)
It was the same with me at Peter's Place.
At the time I was convinced that I was...

(misery doesn't always love company)
YOU don't KNOW! YOU just have
NO IDEA what Cerebus has been
GOING THROUGH!! (pausing for the
sole purpose of getting me to say
something so that he can interrupt me)

(leaving it a few seconds
to see if that makes a difference)

(2...3...4) Well, I...

NO IDEA WHATSOEVER
(ready to give full vent as soon
as I start to say something else)

(I really try waiting him out this time.
I slowly count to ten. I glance down at the
bar for a couple of seconds and then look
back at him. I clear my throat. I lean away
from him. I frown) I suppose that...

NONE!

(he hasn't moved a muscle. He's ready to
vent, but not until I try to say something
again. This time I don't even bother to
try to wait him out) I'm sure you're...

CEREBUS has been here for YEARS!
Years and YEARS! Winter, spring,
summer, fall, winter, spring, summer,
fall. NO one to talk to, NOTHING to do
all day but stand around
and...and...That's IT! That's all
Cerebus does is STAND AROUND.
All...DAY! Going crazy. DAY after
DAY! MONTH after MONTH! YEAR
after YEAR! (remembering that there
are no months or years anymore,
he pauses just long enough to

allow me to wedge myself into his
monologue) Nothing to do but listen
to all the stupid voices in your head...

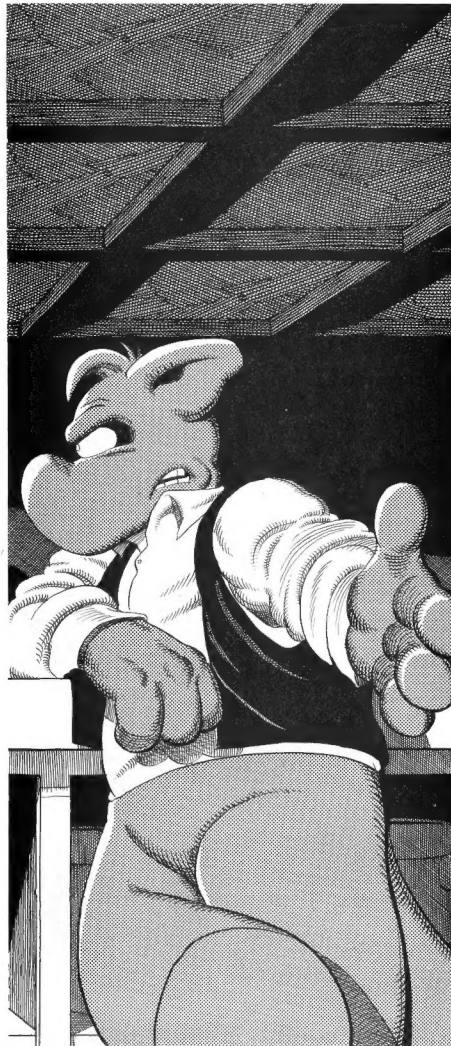
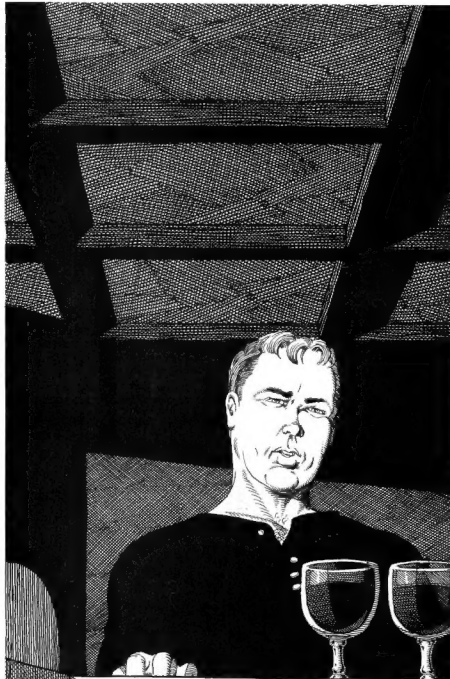
ARGUING and
ARGUING and ARGUING.

(adapting myself to his rhythm while
taking it down a notch or two)
Back and forth and back and forth...

AROUND AND AROUND and (running
out of gas) Around...and...around...

...the same...old... tired... arguments.

(with resignation) Aye.



Never getting an answer. Just the same
stupid questions. Just...(intentionally leaving
the thought unfinished)

(picking up the cue) Just...two exhausted
to finish the thought himself) (he switches
gears) It just seems so (almost
whining)...unFAIR. (building his legal
argument) (matter-of-factly) Cerebus just
stays here. Cerebus doesn't see ANYbody.

(I know he's lying, but I let it go because of
time constraints)

Cerebus just keeps to himself and keeps
his tavern in good running order.
(warning to his self-righteousness since he
assumes I don't know him) Cerebus
doesn't BOTHER anyone. Cerebus
doesn't interfere in anyone else's life.

(I almost interrupt to ask about Rick and
Joanne, but the clock is ticking)

And Cerebus DEFINITELY is not
driving ANYone crazy. And YET! (his big
finish) CEREBUS IS BEING DRIVEN
CRAZY HIMSELF! (scowling at me,
defying me to find a flaw in his reasoning)

(not moving a muscle, not saying a word)

(thinking he has me cornered)
So where is the fairness in that?

(not moving a muscle, not saying a word)

Hank? Where is the fairness (displaying
his left hand, palm upward on the bar in
front of me) if CEREBUS isn't driving
ANYone crazy (sweeping the hand
away in a grandiloquent gesture)
and yet CEREBUS...IS...being
driven crazy HIMSELF?!

(not moving a muscle, not saying a word)

Hank?

(His "hank?" lacks its previous
belligerence. The discussion about the
voices in his head has set his thoughts
hurting along a specific trajectory. He
really wants to know what this customer
he has never seen before thinks is "fair"
about the situation in which he, Cerebus,
finds himself. One of the voices in his
head — there are only two now — has
begun to question the reason for that.)

(not moving a muscle, not saying a word)

(quietly) Cerebus is not
driving ANYone crazy.

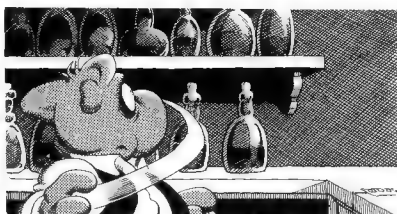
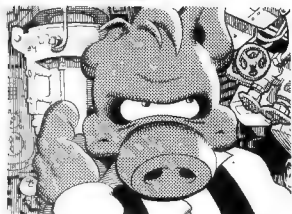
(not moving a muscle, not saying a word)

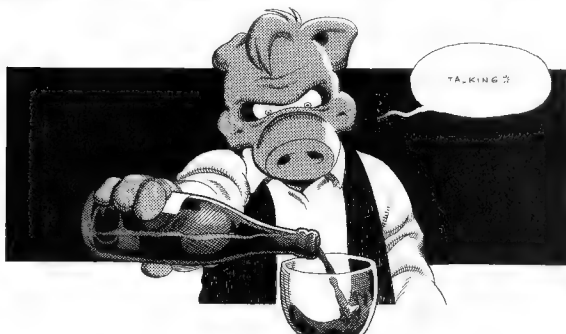
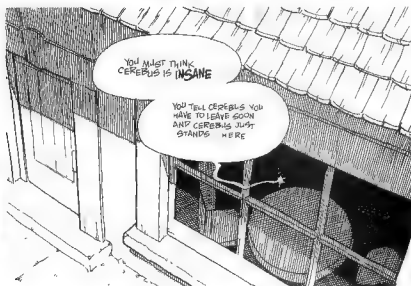
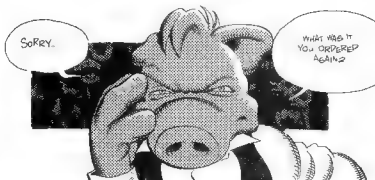
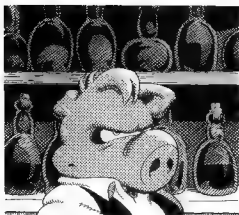
(attentively) ...so why is Cerebus being
driven crazy...himself? (he leans his head
on his right hand without taking his eyes
off me for even a split second. His posture
and his expression indicate, very clearly,
that he is not going to move until he has
a satisfactory answer)

(the staring contest continues for about
thirty seconds or so. I blink several times,
at regular intervals)

(Cerebus doesn't blink at all)

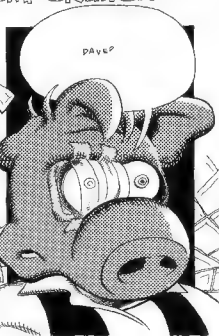
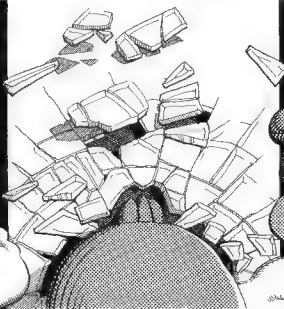
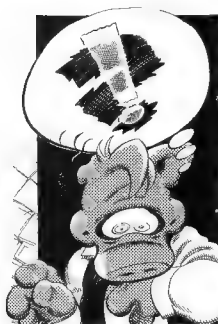
(chucking and shifting on the barstool to
scratch my back with my left thumb)
Well...actually (chucking again)

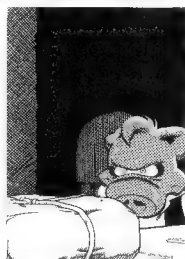
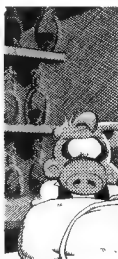
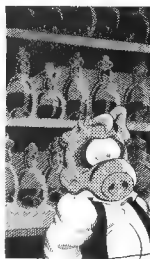
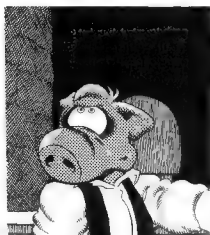






STOMP STOMP STOMP CRUNCH CRUNCH





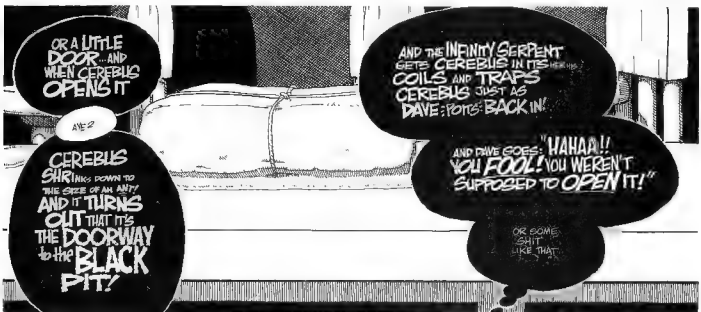
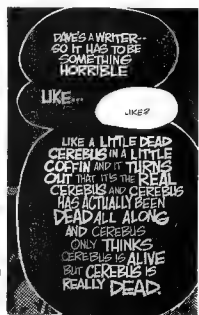
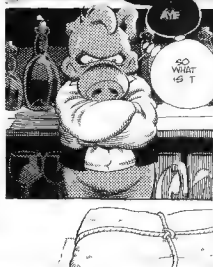
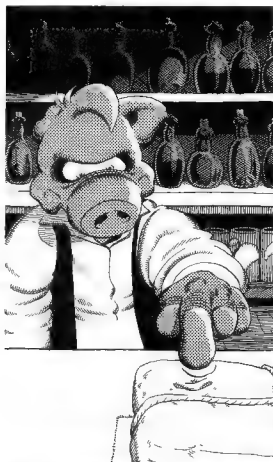
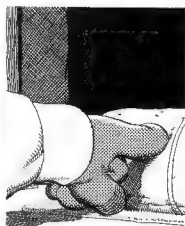
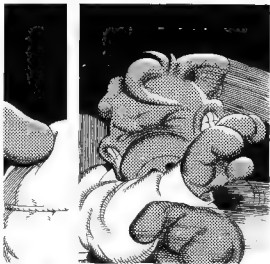
CEREBUS IS
GOING TO
TOUCH IT.

WHAT?



BUT...





OR A LITTLE
DOOR - AND
WHEN CEREBUS
OPENS IT

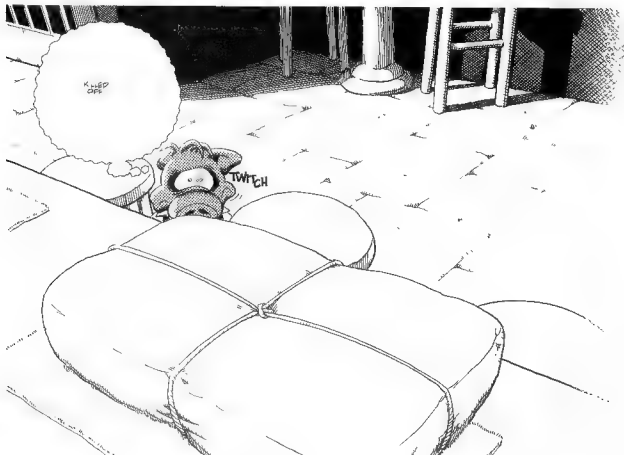
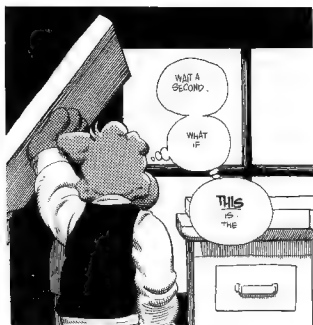
AYE?

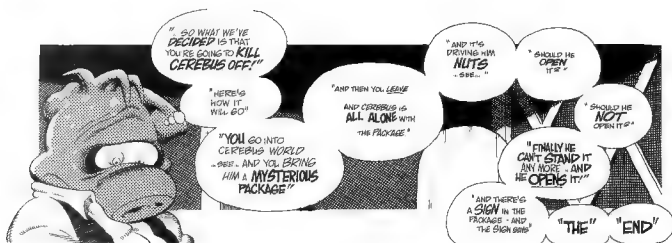
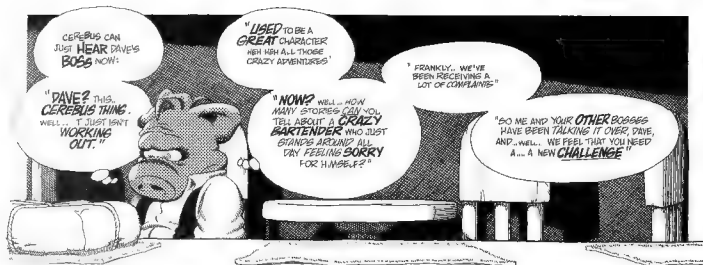
CEREBUS
SHRINKS DOWN TO
THE SIZE OF AN ANTY
AND IT TURNS
OUT THAT IT'S
THE DOORWAY
TO THE BLACK
PIT!

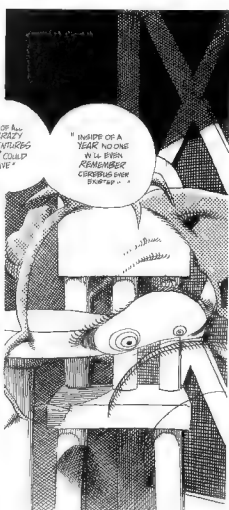
AND THE INFINITY SERPENT
GETS CEREBUS IN ITS
COILS AND TRAPS
CEREBUS JUST AS
DAVE POTS BACK IN!

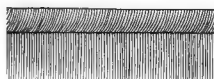
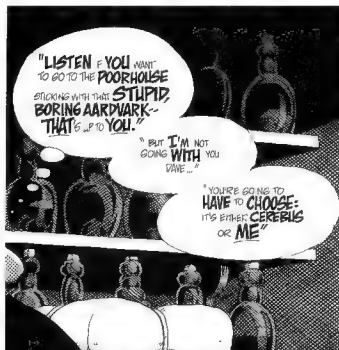
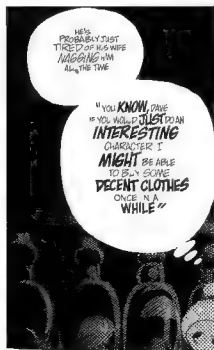
AND DAVE GOES: "HAHA!!
YOU FOOL! YOU WEREN'T
SUPPOSED TO OPEN IT!"

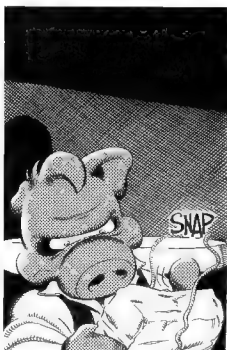
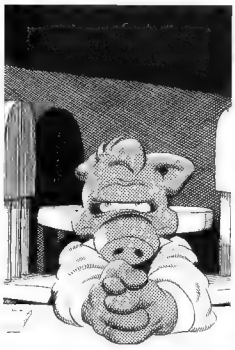
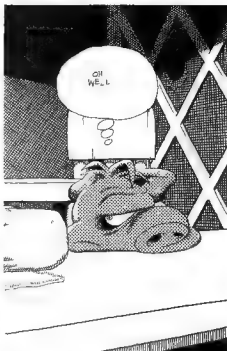
OR SOME
SHIT
LIKE THAT

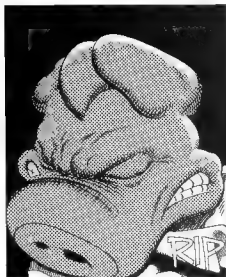
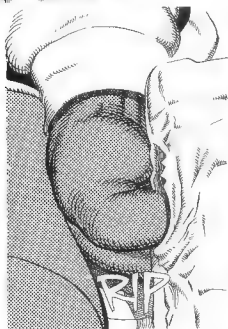
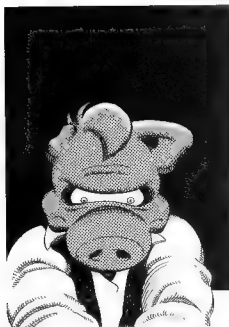












AARDVARK COMMENT

Dear sir,

I am sending to you, to be appreciated, unpublished comics, of my authorship, which I intend to see approved by your agency.

I would like to ask you that after have know this work and have analysed and judge by the Artistic Dept., send the correspondence for the following address:

Carlos Alberto da Costa AMORIM
Rua Radmacker, 54/201
CEP 20511-310 Rio de Janeiro BRASIL

Thanking for your special attention.

I thought I'd run this uncorrected so you nice folks could see one of the big reasons why I decided to do the Cerebus Guide to Self-Publishing. Carlos? Your complimentary copy is on its way courtesy of the Aardvark-Vanaheim Artistic Dept.

To Aardvark Comment,

Ha!

You did it. Finally. And I bet you thought we wouldn't notice! Nay, sir — we pay attention out here in readers-land! Some 100 issues ago someone (Cassandra the Witch?) asked you in a by-line to her letter, "Can you make Cerebus say 'Yes indeedy' for me?"

And now you did. In #222. (Well, it was an inner dialogue — but still!)

So, Dave, you do fulfill requests?

Harald

(back from not-writing-letters-coma)

You know me — I live but to cater to each and every reader's slightest whim. Of course, I only have seventy issues left to do it in (having finished my part of issue 230 a couple of days ago), so get those dialogue requests in as soon as possible.

Dear Dave,

It's been a while since I attempted to write a letter to you (though I've never actually mailed one) and even longer since I spoke with you and/or Ger on the phone (I never knew for sure which of you it was on either occasion, since each of you [or one of you] assured me that "yes," this was Dave, in much the same manner with which Jon Lovitz assured 25 million viewers of *SNL* in the late '80s that he had slept with Morgan Fairchild).

I would like, however, to go on record in addending your readers' astute responses to your Gold Logo 0 "contest," as awarded in the Aardvark Comment of issue

#225 (happy 20th! and, yes, it did sneak up on me and, yes, I will order the signed companion piece to my autographed, sketched First Half poster from Tour '92 Kansas City).

I think your readers might be interested in hearing that Miss Heimel may have lifted at least one, if not two or three, of her book titles from well-known singer/songwriters. I do not know whether she credited the/these singer/songwriters, as I have not read her books, even though I am a psychologist. You see, being one of the few existing *conservative* psychologists, I stay away from pop psychology or anything that smacks thereof.

Anyway, the title, "Get Your Tongue Out of My Mouth, I'm Kissing You Goodbye" was at least sung, if not originally penned, by the late John Denver. I witnessed it on a re-run of the Charles Grodin show about a week after Mr. Denver's unfortunate and sad demise. (And, not to be crude, but I always wondered, after reading Doonesbury, if Hunter Thompson really did try to poach John for singing out of doors in their shared Aspen suburb.)

The title "If You Can't Live Without Me, Why Aren't You Dead Yet?" may or may not have been lifted, with or without credit, from a singer/songwriter, to my knowledge, as I have not heard it in song.

Finally, being a die-hard Parrothead, I must inform you that the title "When Your Phone Doesn't Ring, It'll Be Me" is lifted from the great Jimmy Buffett song, "If the Phone Doesn't Ring, It's Me." (Credits to Jimmy Buffett, Michael Utley, and Will Jennings.) About this song, he wrote, "This is the closest I can get to a sad song." And while it doesn't quite obtain the coveted "three-syllable rhyme," it does have the great line, "There'll be good days and bad days and going half-mad days: if the phone doesn't ring, it's me." Let us hope that Harperennial Library is not overly rewarding Miss Heimel for possible plagiarism (if that is the case).

Thanks for 20 years,
Jeff Seiler
P.O. Box 93
Sedalia, MO 65302

P.S. In the spirit of the season, tell your readers who might be interested in more Jimmy Buffet music to check out *Christmas Island*, the CD, and "Ho, Ho, Ho, and A Bottle of Rum (Santa's Run Off to the Caribbean)." Good stuff after 3-plus hours of Mannheim Steamroller.

P.P.S. These latter days should prove quite revelatory.

P.P.P.S. What the heck is the cost of postage to Canada? I sent it under cover of 96¢ U.S.

P.P.P.P.S. I have a Gold 0 — so a sketch of Mick and/or Keef to go with my front row center ticket stub from the

Bridges to Babylon — St. Louis concert would be extra special. Pleecease?

You see what happens? I tell you guys that I play requests and — boom! — the very next letter wants a Mick or Keef sketch. Forget it. I'm petulantly withdrawing my offer. No more requests. Jeff just ruined it for everyone. I hope you're proud of yourself, Mr. Seiler.

Say, any Cynthia Heimel fans out there want to come to the lady's defense? If I'm not mistaken, Mr. Jeff "gimme a sketch" Seiler just called her a possible plagiarist.

Dear Dave,

Boy, don't I feel like an idiot! Here I am, a 29-year-old teacher, with a Master's degree, who's performed both stand-up comedy and piano in front of audiences, and the first time I meet you, I can't think of a thing to say.

Sheesh.

Trust me, hero worship isn't my style. And I was in the comics scene (as a store owner) for years, so I've met, and drank with, some well-respected talent.

It was during one of these sessions that I think Richard Pini said, "We can have 500 people come up to us and tell us we're great, which is wonderful for the ego, but they never tell us why, or what about the work that's so great, just that it's, well, great."

I swore, if I had an opportunity to say anything to you, it would at least be something meaningful.

Heh. Heh.

Yeah, right. In 60 seconds, in a jostling line, in the heat of the moment, I'm supposed to tell a person I respect and admire how I feel about his creation and life's work.

So sue me, I couldn't.

And that's why you're getting this letter.

I began reading *Cerebus* when I was 13. I was handed an issue as a gift by a fan. It was the first appearance of the Moon Roach. I didn't get it. I thought the dialogue was amusing, but I didn't get it. I liked the art, liked the character a lot, but really had no grip on the story or the motivation. It was during a pretty cool part of the early *X-Men* line, so I let it slip away.

The same person gave me several more issues and made me read them. Ah, I thought. A story. Now I began to get it. Understanding by force: not a method I utilize in class currently, but I've considered it...

*Side note. I think it interesting that the first time I meet you is at the 20th anniversary of *Heavy Metal* hosted by Kevin Eastman. Not to trivialize either of your work, but, if I understand it correctly, you've both built impressive careers on what was, basically, a joke. Yours a Conan parody and his a pop-culture thing. But I digress.

I became an avid collector and owned, at one time, the stuffed *Cerebus*, the animation plates, a set of Diamond-back cards, novels, and issues. I moved to and opened a store in Baton Rouge, LA. The store was excellent, since it got me reading other alternative titles, such as *Dalagoda* and *Rude's Nexus* (the only other comic book that my mother reads, aside from yours. If it means anything to

you, she has a Ph.D. and teaches college-level communications).

I became sick of the business and industry after a few short years, in retrospect primarily because of the "flea market" type, but mostly because there seemed to be an overemphasis at the time of art over story. Keith Giffen began beating jokes to death, and Michelinie was nowhere to be found. Everything was a ninja to Miller. Everything was bottom line to Marvel or DC. The industry was becoming more and more viable every day, and greed was the rule.

I got out and stopped collecting. I sold the business for a song and left the state. After all that time, there were only two people I would read: you and Matt Wagner. All right, *Marvelman* too, but that was sporadically.

I moved back to Connecticut where I got roped into working in a store by the same person who introduced me to you. I am probably the only comics-store employee in history who wouldn't read the stuff if you paid me to sit around and do it. Come to think of it, that was pretty much the job...

I would look blankly at the customers when they tried to discuss character or plot or artist/writer. Unless it was you or Wagner or a handful of others. The killing blow for me was when Marvel released that *X-Men* #1 and people were buying it by the case. It was the last time I read anything without an Aardvark in it.

I started reading Wagner again with the last *Grendel* series and now the new *Mage* series. He never let me down either.

And why have I remained so loyal all this time? (Actually, you're probably wondering how much longer I'd go on before I got to the point...)

First, although I sympathize with the character, I don't empathize with him. I don't think anyone can. *Cerebus* is not there to be empathized with. He's just there. He's kinda *like* that friend you invite to parties to watch. You don't want to actually hang out with him, just see what he'll do next.

Cerebus is such a well-rounded, three-dimensional, consistent character. Simple-minded in purpose, direct and obnoxious, but reacting to odd situations and people in a consistent manner.

Second, the story is amazingly creative. As a reader, I never really, truly know what the hell is going to happen next. Sometimes I have no clear idea what is going on. It takes those few issues and a bit of rereading to "get it." It's wonderful to have to actually *read* something.

The combination of these two, leading to the way you ended the first half of the series, was perfect. The character and this story have taken on such life of their own, that the reader shares the feeling that *Cerebus* was just a little more than a mere character. He has definite wants and desires, drives and ambitions, and, more importantly, real, credible reasons for these things.

And that wrap-up of the first half, though not a 100% original concept (comics character relates to the real world), I've gotta give it a 100% for original treatment of the idea. It was highly satisfying.

And there I stood, across the signature table from you, parking ticket in hand to be signed, with all these thoughts

and no idea how to properly communicate them. How do you share with someone the amount of respect and admiration you have for his ability to relate an original tale in such a way that it touches you, unforgettably?

Mr. Sim, I don't know you from Adam and wouldn't have recognized you on the street before this signing, but your talent I would recognize in a heartbeat.

Of course, that's what made actually meeting you worse: What are you like? Were the stories I'd heard about you true? How much of you is in that character you'd created?

Just like your tale, I had no idea what to expect.

What I found was that you were polite, courteous, and funny. You signed my parking ticket (I know, that's why you were there) and drew me a little sketch (now that, you didn't have to do) and chatted for a few moments.

Which, of course, begs the question...Where the hell did the character come from???

Never mind. I don't want to know...

True, the reader is a great part of the process. There is something about the way that you tell a story that strikes a chord in your readers. But, from a critical point of view, if I may, your work is stand-alone excellent. It is unfortunate that the graphic novel is not a more respected medium for storytelling. I truly believe that your collections lend themselves to a much larger audience than the comics readership to which the work is constrained. I show friends, colleagues, and neighbors; most enjoy, some don't get it. I'm thinking about forced reading sessions.

I'd love to expose my students, but I teach 6th grade, and, frankly, there is a bit of nudity and I like my job. That and it is a bit above them. Well, maybe not the Lord Julius stuff...

Thank you for sharing your talent and dream. I've enjoyed it these many years and am looking forward to enjoying it for the years to come.

Michael Fryar
P.O. Box 888
Branford, CT 06405

See? There's the perfect reason to get me to autograph something weird at a signing. As soon as I read your letter, I went, "Oh, right. The traffic ticket guy." Actually, in the context of the medium, I based my career on a funny-animal version of Barry Windsor-Smith's "Red Nails" Conan story, and Kevin (and Peter) based their career on a funny-animal version of Frank Miller's Ronin. We just went in different directions after that. I know Diana will be pleased that you mentioned her brother-in-law so favourably. She might even be able to get Matt to have Grendel say "Yes, indeedy" in a future story for you. Or maybe he'll do you a free sketch of Mick or Keef. Matt's a nice guy. I'm sure he wouldn't mind.

One way or the other, Diana will get back to you about it. Hey, it's not as if she has a whole lot to do.

She's just — you know — an editor. I'm going to stop now while I still have a prufrotter...

Dave,

Has that much time passed since issue 151? This time around, I haven't really noticed. I can still remember the chilling fact that *Cerebus* is ending when I saw the poster on the back cover. You hit the midway with *Cerebus* all alone. Something moved me to write you a letter about the bit of sadness I felt about reaching the middle, and you printed it. That same unease with reaching 300 continues every month I buy your book.

Time does amazing things. The earth spins, rotates around the sun, and we all get older. *Cerebus* seems to be dealing with the issues of his life. His internal conversation continues to make me laugh at my own voices. I guess I wrote that last letter to you about seven years ago. A definite low point in my life, once again giving me a little relevance on *Cerebus*' isolation. Regrouping, clawing my way out of the gutters of the "real world" (not the MTV version!), I've come a long way. Grown up a lot, etc.

There's always been your book. One of the few constants in my life since 1982 — I really don't want to see the story end. Of course, I look forward to seeing if *Cerebus* ever leaves his pub. The continuing homosexual hints are beginning to make me wonder what's up, as well as Rick's loss of reality. Like most things, you've continued to keep a part of my brain, the *Cerebus* cells, waiting for the next fix.

I live in San Francisco now, and the comics store in my neighborhood left 224 out of my subscription bag. Had to go hunt it down before reading 225. Some things never change! I couldn't help but laugh at myself, though. Here's a 28-year-old with a steady job and a fulfilling life, on his bike like the 10-year-old he wants to be. Searching for that missed issue of his favorite comic. You know, it felt great doing that.

So you're only 75 issues away from the end. On to other things, just like reality. I haven't planned it through, but I'm sure I'll survive. I enjoy the sadness of getting closer to 300, because the story continues. Just like my own story, I guess. And everybody else's story. Just like your bit in your own comic, you've gotten into some of your readers' heads as well. At least, you're in mine.

So, until the end, enjoy the holidays, the new millennium, and all that weirdness that seems to be floating around. Like I said in that last letter, I'll be there with you. Everything ends at some point, so I look forward to seeing what else is in your imagination for me to absorb into mine.

Russell Howze
San Francisco, CA

Hey, Russell! Nice to hear from you again. I have nothing to compare the experience to: thinking of some-

thing as "almost over" that still has about six years left on the meter. Must be weird for you guys, eh?

❖ ❖ ❖ ❖ ❖ ❖ ❖ ❖ ❖

Dave,

My nomination for the Mama's Boy sweepstakes is Robert E. Howard.

Robert Rowe

12312 Sherman Way #217

North Hollywood, CA 91605 USA

Ooh, good one, Robert. From what I remember of the REH legend, so distraught was the Conan creator over the death of his mother, he blew his brains out. Yeah, I'll give you that one, all right.

Dear Dave,

Mama's Boys — Alfred Hitchcock, Charles Chaplin, Douglas MacArthur. That's all I have time for. Sorry!

Oscar Stern

454 6th Ave. #3R

Brooklyn, NY 11215-4017

Three more good ones from the creator of Wu Wei. I wanted to do some fact-checking with my mum before I actually commit part four of "Mama's Boy" to cold, hard type, and she and my Dad have just left for a Florida vacation, so — next time, for sure (maybe). And for all you Aardvark Comment fans who keep asking me to bring it back, you're welcome. For all of you who wanted to read part four, I'm sorry.

continued

FROM COVER

welcome us at the Casino, just a small party, the MacLeishes, the Murphys, the Fitzgeralds and we who were living at the villa. No one drank anything stronger than champagne and it was very gay and obviously a splendid place to write. There was going to be everything that a man needed to write except to be alone.

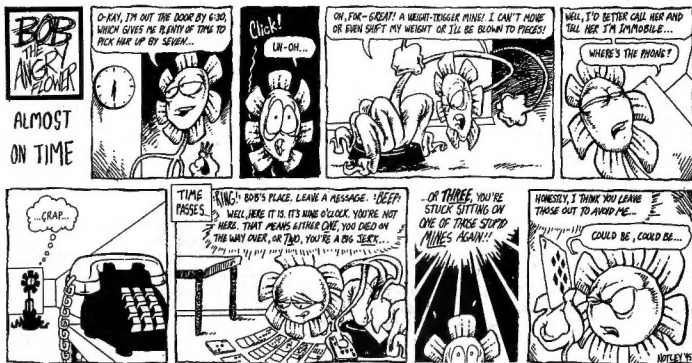
Zelda was very beautiful and was tanned a lovely gold colour and her hair was a beautiful dark gold and she was very friendly. Her hawk's eyes were clear and calm. I knew everything was all right and was going to turn out well in the end when she leaned forward and said to me.

telling me her great secret, 'Ernest, don't you think Al Jolson is greater than Jesus?'

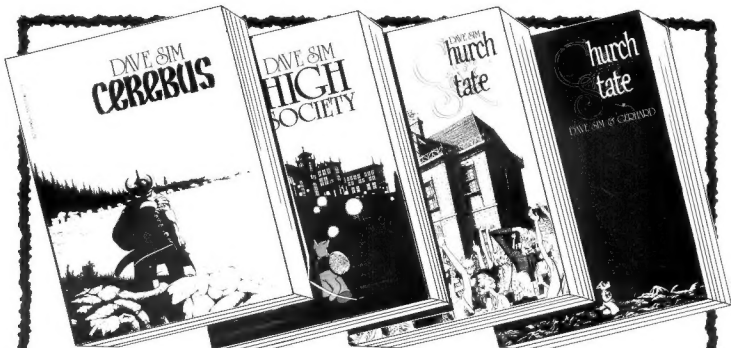
Nobody thought anything of it at the time. It was only Zelda's secret that she shared with me, as a hawk might share something with a man. But hawks do not share. Scott did not write anything any more that was good until after he knew that she was insane.

Last issue's excerpt: Karen Armstrong

Muhammad: A Western Attempt to Understand Islam



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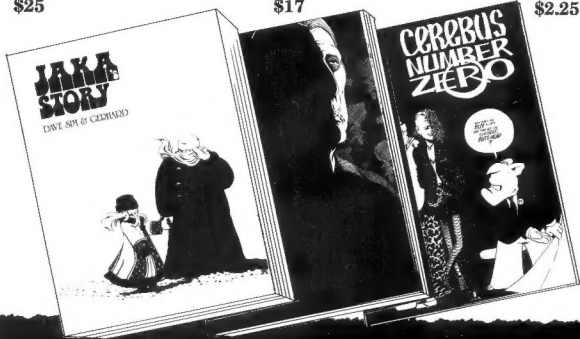
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Dave (*Cerebus*) Sim, Joe (*Fax from Sarajevo*) Kubert, Steve (*Tyrant*) Bissette and John (so that's *what he looks like*) Severin at the Words and Pictures Museum in Northampton MA, during the *Heavy Metal* 20th anniversary signing. What a great, great time I had. You really should've been there.
(photo courtesy of Fiona and friends — Words & Pictures Museum)